

Partes feminarum: Gender Representations in Baroque Music
David Schulenberg (1997)

Discussions of European classical compositions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries once habitually referred to certain types of music as masculine or feminine, respectively. Although it is no longer fashionable to speak of a “feminine” second theme in a sonata-allegro form, most listeners still share an understanding of what this gendered analytic language meant. This is because the conventions established by eighteenth- and especially nineteenth-century composers and listeners for representing gender or gendered qualities continue to be reinforced by music that is likely to be heard in the concert hall, in film scores, and in television, video, and game soundtracks. Earlier music, on the other hand, lacks signs for gender that are as readily decrypted by most listeners. Perhaps for this reason, for at least a decade gender representation has been a particular concern in writings about Baroque music.¹

The question of gender representation can raise difficult, sometimes disturbing issues, especially when considered within the context of societies or cultures different from ours. Most historical societies—including Baroque urban society—held distinctly less egalitarian views of the sexes than is now customary and considered it quite proper to view women not only as the intellectual and social inferiors of men but as objects rightly subjected to men's control and desires. Much of the poetry that was set to music and performed by Baroque musicians—men as well as women—took such attitudes for granted, if only because it was written for audiences that were either entirely male or were (like most aspects of Baroque culture) dominated by wealthy men. Thus the present examination of some of that music may trouble or provoke discomfort in some readers, exploring as it does Baroque views of gender relations, the body, and the nature of women.

In addition, gender representation is a subset of musical representation in general, and considerations of the latter can provoke discomfort of a different sort as one examines received notions of how music expresses emotions or conveys meaning. Aestheticians have frequently asked in what sense music, as opposed to language or the visual arts, can represent anything, and it is generally acknowledged that music cannot convey meaning or represent objects in the same way or with the same degree of precision as other media.² Gender is a particularly complex object. Thus, even if one admits the possibility of music's representing abstract motions or objects, or idealized emotions such as happiness and sadness, one might wonder how music

¹ See, for example, Susan McClary: *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 35–52, 86–90, as well as her work on Bach cited below; and Wendy Heller, “Chastity, Heorism, and Allure: Women in the Opera of Seventeenth-Century Venice” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1995) and two subsequent books on related topics.

² On the general philosophical problem of musical representation see, *inter alia*, Peter Kivy, *Sound and Semblance: Reflections on Musical Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), and Kendall Walton, “Listening With Imagination: Is Music Representational?,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52 (1994): 47–61.

might represent something as complex as gender. The fact that gender has been constructed differently in different times and places poses a further complication; here I consider how the music in question might have represented gender as conceived within the culture that produced the music. A further consideration is that the music I am considering is vocal: hence it becomes particularly important to determine whether gender representation in these works is primarily the product of the verbal text, as opposed to the music or to some synergy between text and music.

Before proceeding further, a brief clarification is in order. It goes without saying that any present-day listener is free to listen to Baroque music in whatever way they wish. A listener accustomed to envisaging a woman represented in a programmatic nineteenth-century work such as Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* can do the same thing in hearing an aria by Bach or Handel. But insofar as any such image is constructed upon concrete elements in the music and not wholly out of the listener's private fantasy, the signs or musical props on which such depictions are constructed must be of different types, if only because Baroque music is formally quite different from Romantic music.³ A recurring melisma on a single significant word, the insistent repetition of a single rhythmic motive, the association of a particular chromatic line or modulation with a textual refrain line—these things differ significantly from the types of themes, accompanimental patterns, and orchestral and pianistic colors and timbres on which nineteenth-century musical expression tends to be based.

The manner in which the modern concert-goer responds to these cues is to a greater or lesser degree subconscious, but it is not inborn; rather it is learned through long experience with such music. By the same token, one may suppose that listeners in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries learned to construct their responses to music—no doubt in a manner quite different from modern or nineteenth-century listeners. For example, many members of the original audiences of Baroque works had at least some training in classical rhetoric and were attuned to the modes of rhetorical expression, including the musical rhetoric employed by composers.⁴ Such listeners would have been more likely than modern listeners to focus on discrete, concrete musical signs of the type enumerated above, which constitute the basis of Baroque musical rhetoric.

How might such signs, or other elements of Baroque music, have been involved in representations of gender? Rather than consider the question in the abstract, it makes sense to limit one's purview to a particular Baroque repertory or repertories. One seemingly obvious choice would be opera and cantata, particularly works containing female dramatic roles—that is, the *partes feminarum* of my title—inasmuch as women can be presumed to have constituted the marked gender in most artworks of the period. Presumably, by examining representations of

³ In referring to music as presenting “props” on which the listener imaginately constructs an interpretation, I draw on the aesthetics of Kendall Walton; see in particular his “Listening With Imagination.”

⁴ On the rhetorical element in Baroque musical education, see George Buelow, “Music, Rhetoric, and the Concept of the Affections: A Selective Bibliography,” *Music Library Association Notes* 30 (1973): 250–1; and John Butt, *Music Education and the Art of Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 46–51.

women in particular works, one might discover some general principles concerning the representation of gender in Baroque music. Yet, the possibility must be borne in mind that this is not a properly formulated question—indeed, that to seek such a thing as gender representation in Baroque music may be a vestige of nineteenth-century thinking about musical representation.

The works to be considered here are by two composers, Barbara Strozzi (1619–77) and Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750). This may seem an utterly disparate pair of musicians, yet the works to be discussed pose a number of similar questions. Moreover, the means of representation and signification in the vocal works of the two composers present many close parallels. In particular, both composers rely on the fundamental Baroque principle of musical rhetoric, which centers on the presentation of verbal texts through specific music-rhetorical devices. The latter tend to be applied to individual words or brief verbal phrases: a single word may be set apart by a lengthy melisma, a notable harmony or melodic interval, or the like; a short expression may be repeated many times, articulated distinctly by rests. One product of such devices is an atomization of the text, which is decomposed into a series of discreet fragments. This is of particular relevance to our present topic when the words in question have significance for gender, as in references to parts of the body or to erotic or sexual passions. Such fragmentation reinforces the tendency of Baroque poetry to fragment the person, that is, to treat both mind and body as sums of discreet, idealized or abstracted elements: individual limbs, breasts, mouths, and lips, or essentialized Cartesian passions.

Equally important in Baroque rhetoric, although often overlooked in modern accounts of the music, is the situation in which the work is presented: who composed it, who performed it, for what purpose, and for whom. These considerations correspond in part with the *loci topici*, the questions that any classically schooled rhetorician asked himself or herself before composing an oration. We may understand them as concerning the performatives of the works, understanding “works” both as compositions on paper or notated texts and as musical acts presented under specific historical circumstances.⁵ Especially when we consider that the original audiences for Strozzi's works (if not Bach's) may have been comprised predominantly or entirely of upper-class males, the significance of these performatives for the issue of gender representation is self-evident.

The mists obscuring the life of Barbara Strozzi have been gradually lifting, thanks to the work of Ellen Rosand and, more recently, Beth Glixon.⁶ The majority of her surviving music

⁵ By a *performative* I mean something which it is the purpose of the work to accomplish. In the case of one of Strozzi's cantatas, the latter presumably would have included not only artistic or aesthetic ends (such as the successful representation of the poem's affective imagery) but personal and perhaps even commercial ones, such as eliciting the audience's admiration and financial support for the composer-performer.

⁶ Rosand: “The Voice of Barbara Strozzi,” in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 168–90; Glixon: “New Light on the Life and Career of Barbara Strozzi,” paper read March 30, 1996, at the annual meeting of the South Central chapter of the American Musicological Society, subsequently published in *Musical Quarterly* (see also Beth Glixon,

consists of virtuoso arias and cantatas for soprano and continuo. It is usually presumed that these were written for her own performances before the Accademia degli Unisoni, the aristocratic Venetian academy founded by her presumed father the poet Giulio Strozzi. If this is true, then we may envisage Strozzi, a supremely talented woman, presenting for a group of men virtuoso solo works whose texts, more often than not, are thinly veiled expressions of unrestrained eroticism.

The issue of Strozzi's relationship to her male audiences is complicated by the recurrent question of whether Strozzi was a courtesan. Glixon has shown that Strozzi bore children possibly as a result of a liaison with a Venetian noble who was a patron of her father. But whether or not she was technically a courtesan in the strict sense of the term, she and her father seem to have intentionally exploited what was within Venetian seventeenth-century society a highly suggestive situation. That is to say that she apparently wrote music for her own performance in a homosocial environment in which she would have been an object of admiration and desire shared in varying degrees by all the members of her father's academy.⁷ Certainly the obsessive harping of the poetry in her works on tongues that cannot speak their love, hearts that are on fire, and so forth, although couched in conventional metaphors, takes on added meaning if it can be understood as referring to emotions and desires felt by members of this immediate circle. One might even suppose that she was in their eyes a symbol or manifestation of the *ignota dea* to whom some of their publications were dedicated.⁸

The persona of the poetry is more often male than female, suggesting that Strozzi more often than not sang of men's passions for women; certainly her surviving works tend to draw the male speaker more fully than they do the female object of his desire. The situation is somewhat less charged with issues of gender confusion or transgression than it might be in opera, however, since in the lyrical genres of cantata and strophic aria in which Strozzi worked the singer is in principle reading a poem, not acting a role. This constitutes a fundamental distinction between opera and cantata, with important implications for the structure of the music, which can proceed at a more leisurely pace in the non-theatrical genres. To be sure, the singer in these works is arguably still playing a role in some sense. Indeed, the original performance situation would

“More on the Life and Death of Barbara Strozzi,” *The Musical Quarterly* 83 [1999]: 134–41). I am grateful to Prof. Glixon for sending me a pre-publication copy of her paper.

⁷ It is not irrelevant to mention in this context the picture by the Genoan painter Bernardo Strozzi thought to be Strozzi's portrait, traditionally entitled *Female Musician With Viola da Gamba*, now in the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden; see Rosand, 184–87. Glixon adduces documentary evidence supporting the identification, based in part on the composer's physical attributes as displayed in the painting. If the figure really is Strozzi, it is clear that despite her talents she was as subject to as unrestrained a male gaze as any courtesan might have been. The painting was later owned by Count Algarotti, eighteenth-century critic of opera and musical adviser to King Frederick II of Prussia.

⁸ See Rosand, 171; for the dedication *ignotae deae* of Strozzi's own Opus 3, see the facsimile in *Cantatas by Barbara Strozzi 1619–c. 1664 [sic]*, ed. Ellen Rosand, *The Italian Cantata in the Seventeenth Century*, 5 (New York: Garland: 1986), 65.

presumably have aroused a certain degree of titillation through the confusion of roles created by a woman's singing a man's poetry in praise of herself or urging her own acquiescence to his desires.

It would appear from the works available in modern editions and facsimiles that Strozzi followed convention in setting male laments—and there are many of these—as full-fledged cantatas or large-scale arias, whereas the occasional texts with female personae are cast as simpler strophic arias. For example, Strozzi's Opus 2 includes a pair of strophic arias of which the first is a male complaint about the meretriciousness of a certain woman singer who, he believes, has cuckolded him (see ex. 3 below). Glixon has noted the potentially autobiographical element of this song,⁹ a recurring possibility in Strozzi's works. This aria, entitled *La, sol, fa, mi, re, do*, is followed by a shorter and simpler *Giusta negativa* in which a presumably female singer justifies her refusal to perform for an unnamed man. Although not exactly a reply to the preceding item, its position immediately afterwards is significant, and despite being shorter and somewhat simpler musically it is no means lacking in expressive music-rhetorical elements. If we choose to hear the woman's voice of the poem as Strozzi's own, then it is of some interest in its implication that she plays keyboard instruments equally as well as she sings, for the parallel structure of its two stanzas places the two most significant melismas on words referring to singing and playing, respectively.

Despite the presumably different genders of the speakers in the two songs, there is no apparent effort to characterize them musically as male and female, respectively, apart from the greater musical elaboration of the first song. Nor is it easy to find gendered bifurcations of this type elsewhere in Strozzi's work or indeed in Baroque music in general. Recent musicology has emphasized the laments of female characters in opera.¹⁰ There appears, however, to be no such association in the seventeenth-century cantata repertory.

By the same token, I would hesitate before relating triple-time aria style in a general manner with amorous texts, as in some recent writings.¹¹ Some such association clearly exists in

⁹ “New Light.” Facsimile of both arias in *Cantatas*, 55–61.

¹⁰ E.g., McClary writes that “most of the lamenters celebrated in dramatic works after *L'Orfeo* (Arianna, Penelope, and Ottavia) are female” (*Feminine Endings*, 49); cf. Heller (*Chastity, Heroism, and Allure*, 145): “lamenting has always been the most acceptable way for women to achieve eloquence. It is not so much that men did not lament, but...it is women who 'tend to weep longer, louder'” (quoting Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Women's Laments and Greek Literature*, London: Routledge, 1992, no page given).

¹¹ Tim Carter at first asserts that “the triple-time aria is the musical language of love” but then immediately qualifies this, referring instead to “particular kinds of triple-time writing”; see “Resemblance and Representation: Towards a New Aesthetic in the Music of Monteverdi,” in *Con che soavità: Studies in Italian Opera, Song, and Dance, 1580–1740*, ed. Iain Fenlon and Tim Carter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 129. Compare Heller, 185, on the Carthaginian Ladies in Cavalli's *Didone*, who “demonstrate the appropriate mode of expression for the lascivious woman”: evidently their “slipping easily into triple meter,” mentioned earlier in the discussion.

specific instances. But many triple-time passages in opera and cantata seem to provide no more than the same sort of metrical variety and relaxation of tension furnished by triple-time *Nachtänze* as in, for example, the pavane-galliard pairs of Italianate dance music. Indeed, triple time is no more intrinsically erotic or inherently more suited to the dance than is duple or quadruple time. But perhaps it takes on associations with the dance, as well as qualities that we might describe as easy, relaxed, flowing, and so forth, by virtue of its antithesis with duple or quadruple time, which in this repertory is the only meter employed for the more discursive, rhythmically irregular types of recitative. Such an antithesis may be elicited in the music by any number of things mentioned in a text: the rustle of a woman's skirt in the third stanza of Strozzi's hexachord aria; the retort to the unnamed *signore* in the aria that follows it.

A further example of this sort of antithesis can be found in Strozzi's *Amante segreto*, which opens with a *ciacona* passage in triple time that alternates several times with more recitative-like music in duple time (ex. 1).¹² The lament of a timid male lover, the work is unusual for opening with such a passage, which sets a refrain beginning with the words *Voglio morire* ("I wish to die"). Hence, in the course of the work the *ciacona* music becomes clearly associated with the verbal lament. Yet I would refrain here from borrowing Ellen Rosand's formulation of the *ciacona* bass as an "emblem" of lament.¹³ Only the context, that is, the combination of text, music, and performing situation, might determine the meaning of a musical representation so specifically that the latter could be termed an "emblem."

The image shows a musical score for two pieces: 'L'Amante segreto' and 'Parole d'incerto'. The score is written on four staves. The first staff is the vocal line, starting with a large decorative initial 'V' and the lyrics 'Oglio voglio voglio morire mo ri'. The second staff is the bass line. The third and fourth staves continue the vocal and bass lines respectively, with lyrics 're più tosto ch'il mio mal più tosto ch'il mio mal venga a scopri re'. The music alternates between triple and duple time signatures.

1a. *Ciacona* passage from Strozzi, *L'amante segreto*, from Op. 2 (1651), p. 31

¹² The work appeared in Strozzi's Op. 2 (1651); facsimile in *Cantatas*, 33–7.

¹³ "The Descending Tetrachord: An Emblem of Lament," *Musical Quarterly* 65 (1979): 346–59.



1a. Recitative-like passage from Strozzi, *L'amante segreto*, from Op. 2 (1651), p. 31

The problem, here as in the case of the triple-time aria, lies in attaching too specific a meaning to musical devices that, in themselves, do little more than create a contrast of some sort between two (or more) distinct passages, or that emphasize or articulate the setting of a particular word or phrase in some distinctive way. Modern discussions of this repertory frequently describe the latter process as word painting, but rarely can the music be said truly to draw specific words or images. Thus, in the great cantata that opens Strozzi's Opus 7, *Sino alla morte*, the decaying parts of the body (*guancie e labri*) receive much the same melismatic treatment accorded such words as *morte* (ex. 2).¹⁴ As noted earlier, one peculiarly Baroque effect of such musical rhetoric is to fragment the object of the poetry, in this case the body of the beloved, while monumentalizing the images in question, raising them to a status resembling that of the crowns, columns, and other heraldic and architectural elements with which the Baroque stage was scattered. This may tell us something about how Baroque audiences constructed their responses to music and poetry in general. But with respect to gender it merely suggests that its representation was the product of discreet, fragmentary images. The music reinforces this aspect of the poetry, but not by actually depicting anything.

Precisely the same type of musical rhetoric is employed, albeit on a smaller scale, in the ostensibly comic strophic aria *La, sol, fa, mi, re, do*. There the words *canta, sonar, ornato*, and the like receive virtuoso melismas; there is also the predictable play on the hexachord syllables that are repeated frequently in the text and that form the basis of numerous puns (ex. 3c). In her reliance on such devices Strozzi is no different from any other Baroque composer, although the relatively leisurely pacing of a solo cantata or aria makes possible an expansive treatment—longer and more frequent melismas, frequent repetitions of text segments—that is relatively rare in the operatic works of Monteverdi and Cavalli, which must have served among her chief models.

¹⁴ Complete facsimile in *Cantatas*, 149–64.

Cantata adagio S
Ino alla mor te
fino alla mor te

2a. Strozzi, *Sino alla morte*, from Op. 7 (1659), p. 4

rir le guan cie le guan cie er fa bri cgan
G impouerir impoue rir le guan cie le guan cie et

2b. Strozzi, *Sino alla morte*, from Op. 7 (1659), p. 13

La sol fa, mi, re, do, Parole del Sig. Gio. Battista Maiorani

A mia donna per che canta per che can non vuol
dir ne si ne no ma par lar sem-

3a. Strozzi, *La, sol, fa, mi, re, do*, stanza 1, from Op. 2 (1651)

A i non canta s'io no conto s'io non con-
to ne la voce tro ua il tuon ne a sonar
lo sti le ha pronto se no se te d'o ro il suon ij

3b. Strozzi, *La, sol, fa, mi, re, do*, stanza 2, from Op. 2 (1651)

speder vuol tanto che trà noi di rò ch'ognun
can taquel che rà io de Gozi il
mi fol dò lei de Cucchi il Rà mi fà.

3c. Strozzi, *La, sol, fa, mi, re, do*, stanza 2, end, from Op. 2 (1651)

Accordingly, the adored body parts catalogued in an erotic aria are sung to in much the same way as are the attributes of Saint Ann in the opening motet of Strozzi's Opus 5 (1655), a collection of sacred works.¹⁵ Several works dedicated to real-life patrons similarly contain not the slightest differentiation of style, nor can one determine the gender of their dedicatee from the manner in which he or she is represented musically.¹⁶ By the same token, there is little musical differentiation of Strozzi's settings of what appear to be self-referential texts. Most frequently mentioned among the latter are texts that incorporate the composer's first name in the guise of the ordinary Italian word *barbara* (barbarous, uncivilized).¹⁷ The word tends to receive short melismas or one or two pointed repetitions, but these arias as a group do not draw any larger picture of "Barbara," nor does the similar group of works that refer to the presumably

¹⁵ *I sacri musicali affetti* (Venice, 1655); facs. ed. Ellen Rosand (New York: Da Capo Press, 1988).

¹⁶ For example, the dedicatory opening cantata of Op. 2, for the marriage of Emperor Ferdinand III and Eleonora of Mantua, begins with a flourish on the tonic chord—for the word *Donna* in the phrase *Donna di maestà*—similar to that which opens *Ardo in tacito foco* as well as countless instrumental toccatas and sonatas.

¹⁷ Rosand (introduction to *Cantatas*, unnumbered page) points to five such settings.

pseudonymous “Lilia.”

More significant than these mostly playful pieces is the *Sonetto proemio*, a duet that opens Strozzi's Op. 1 madrigals (1644); its text implicitly identifies Strozzi with the ancient Greek poet Sappho.¹⁸ Sappho, in the early modern tradition, was identified not so much with what we call lesbian love but as a heterosexual seductress and devotee of Aphrodite.¹⁹ Hence, this reference combines a classical reference flattering to Strozzi with the teasing, courtesan-like behavior referred to earlier. Yet Strozzi's setting makes relatively little of the significant phrase *Saffo novella*, which receives only modest emphasis, through momentary repetition and imitation between the two soprano parts. There are, however, repeated scalar melismas on the word *volo* (I fly), suggesting the speaker's flight from Mount Pieria, home of the muses. These, like the female virtuosos who might have sung this duet, would have served both as symbols of art and objects of erotic desire for the work's presumed audiences.²⁰

Nothing is known, however, about the original or intended performance context of these ensemble works; thus it would be hazardous to elevate suppositions based on their presumed performance context to fast conclusions about their meaning. One can be more certain about a rather different type of musical representation occasionally encountered in Strozzi's music (as also in Monteverdi's). An instance occurs in the large strophic aria that opens Opus 3, wherein the tongue-tied lover who is the persona of the poem stumbles over “the name of her who is my desire” (*il nome di colei ch'è'l mio desio*), twice falling into a long melisma on what would normally be the insignificant word “is.” This is not word painting or even conventional musical rhetoric, but rather a form of dramatic characterization. The meaning that the music is evidently meant to depict is not that of the text; rather the music represents an element in the character of the person who we suppose is singing it. Such representation is taken for granted in dramatic music of the later eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, to which it is basic. But it seems quite rare in the Baroque, even in dramatic music, which far more commonly employs melismas and other elements of musical rhetoric in order to underline the literal meaning of the words to which they are sung.

This appears to remain true in the vocal music of J. S. Bach. Here, of course, we find ourselves in a different world with respect not only to musical style but to the performatives of

¹⁸ Modern edition in *Barbara Strozzi: Il primo libro de madrigali für zwei Stimmen und Basso Continuo*, ed. Elke Mascha Blankenburg (Kassel: Furore, 1993). Despite the title, this edition contains only four of the ten duets in Op. 1, which contains twenty-six works in all.

¹⁹ Chiefly on the basis of her fragment 1; K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 174–5, traces the tradition of Sappho as lesbian in the modern sense only back to Hellenistic times, although there are suggestions of it in a number of other fragments.

²⁰ Several other works in Strozzi's Op. 1 present equally teasing situations, such as the duet *Godere e tacere*, likewise for two sopranos; the latter recalls Monteverdi's *Come dolce hoggi l'auretta* for three sopranos, on a text by Giulio Strozzi.

musical composition and performance.²¹ Yet Bach uses melismas, text repetitions, and other music-rhetorical devices much as does Strozzi. To be sure, the sacred character of most of Bach's surviving vocal music rules out the teasingly erotic situations presented in so much of Strozzi's work. Gendered concepts are frequently present, but women are rarely depicted or even mentioned.

There are, for instance, a number of sacred cantatas for the traditional Marian feasts. But, in keeping with Lutheran tradition, the texts of these works invariably focus on Jesus, who displaces the Virgin as the central figure. A number of the secular cantatas designated *drammi per musica*, that is, serenatas or simple musical dramas, contain female roles. But the latter are generally personified virtues or rivers whose sex is largely decorative. If the music contains any representation at all of the gender or gendered qualities of these female allegorical figures, it is of the most simplistic sort. Thus in Cantata 206 the nymph of the river Pleisse sings an aria to the accompaniment of three flutes—soft instruments that perhaps seemed appropriate for a figure who is presented as a conventionally nurturing female and therefore gentle and unprepossessing. On the other hand, Diana, the virgin goddess of the hunt, is accompanied by horns in her virtuoso aria near the outset of Cantata 208 (the “Hunt” Cantata). Brass instruments are normally associated with the male endeavors of warfare and hunting in Baroque works, but for obvious reasons they are also conventionally attached to this mythological figure, as in Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie*.

Susan McClary has written on the construction of gender in Bach's music, focusing on the late chorale cantata *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, BWV 140.²² Here, as in other Lutheran sacred cantatas on the theme of the sacred marriage, the bride referred to in the text represents not a woman or even women generally, but rather the church or the individual believer. The latter, as McClary notes, may be male or female.²³ Perhaps more to the point, in the original performances of this and most other such works the soprano part that represents the bride would likely have been sung by a boy. This voice in turn would have represented the childlike nature of any human in comparison to the divinity represented by the other figure in the dialog, the bass. The resulting work reflects a hierarchic and patriarchal ideal of marriage, as the female marriage partner is depicted as passive and childlike. This, however, has the effect of feminizing the entire audience or congregation, whose members are presumably supposed to identify with the figure represented by the soprano voice.²⁴

²¹ For example, Bach's performatives presumably included a genuine concern for the spiritual well-being of the congregations that heard his sacred music; even secular cantatas were probably envisaged as conveying uplifting moral lessons.

²² “The Blasphemy of Talking Politics During Bach Year [1985],” in *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance, and Reception*, ed. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), esp. 41–55.

²³ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁴ As McClary notes, *ib.*, 55.

This much seems obvious. Less so is the assertion that “the musical images [that] Bach uses mark it [the Soul or soprano part] as specifically female,” or that the soprano part depicts a “nagging, passive-aggressive wife, insecurely whining for repeated assurances of love and not hearing them when proffered,” as McClary puts it.²⁵ It is true that, in the first duet, the soprano several times repeats the question *Wann kommst du* (“When do you come?”) to a series of brief, insistently articulated, motives (ex. 4). Yet the bass, representing the bridegroom, replies that he is indeed coming (*ich komme*) with fragmentary motives that include variants of those sung by the soprano. These repetitions cannot be sarcastic representations of “whining,” for nothing in the music suggests that they constitute anything more than the common device of isolating and emphasizing the opening words of a text (its *Devis*e) through repetition.

Bach was capable of using musical rhetoric to present a specifically satirical effect, as in Mydas's aria from Cantata 201, *Der Streit zwischen Phoebus und Pan*. Here the insistent repetitions of a distinctive leaping motive in the violins clearly represent the donkey ears—mentioned simultaneously in the text—with which the critic Mydas's bad judgement has been rewarded. In the duet from Cantata 140, however, the only musical representation that approaches, in vividness and specificity, that described by McClary, is in the lively violin accompaniment. The scales or *passaggi* of the latter might be explained by the references to the flickering oil lamp that the bride is holding; this, by extension, suggests an underlying spiritual fervor.

But if McClary's view of gender representation in Cantata 140 is thus open to question, her goal of identifying a particular construction of gender in Bach's musical settings remains worth pursuing. Clearer examples of how Bach's music might contribute to a construction of gender might be sought in a few secular cantatas that take the form of small musical dramas, in particular the comic cantata known today as the Coffee Cantata.²⁶ Even more than the sacred wedding cantatas, this work is charged with gendered oppositions and dramatic situations; among these is the marriage that looms large in the future of the female character Liesgen. The cantata, whose autograph score dates from late 1734 or the beginning of 1735, is usually presumed to have been written for performance by Bach's Collegium Musicum in the coffee house run by Gottfried Zimmermann. This has raised the question of whether women would have been present at the performances of such works as the Coffee Cantata.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid, 53, without specifying what “musical images” are referred to.

²⁶ The text as initially published in Picander's *Gedichte* of 1732 was entitled *Über den Caffee: Cantata*. Bach's autograph score (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz Mus. ms. Bach P 141) is headed: “Schlendrian mit seiner Tochter Liessgen etc.: Eine comische Cantate.”

²⁷ Arnold Schering, *Musikgeschichte Leipzigs* (Leipzig, 1941), 3: 134, paints a picture of the Leipzig coffee houses as male domains. Werner Neumann, “Das 'Bachische Collegium Musicum,’” *Bach-Jahrbuch* 47 (1960): 23–5, corrects aspects of Schering's work; Hans-Joachim Schulze, *Ey! wie schmeckt der Coffee süsse: Johann Sebastian Bachs Kaffee-Kantate in ihrer Zeit* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1985), 18–22, cites additional documents showing that women

9
Wenn kömst du, mein Heil, wenn
Ich kom - me, dein Teil.

11
kömst du, mein Heil, wenn kömst du, mein
Ich kom-me, dein Teil, Ich kom-me.

13
Heil, mein Heil? Ich war - - - te, Ich war - - - te mit
dein Teil, dein Teil, Ich kom-me, Ich kom-me.

15
bren - nen dem Ö - le; wenn kömst du, mein Heil, wenn
Ich kom-me, Ich kom - me, dein Teil.

4. Bach, *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* BWV 140, mvt. 3, mm. 9–20

would probably have been admitted to Leipzig coffee-houses during Bach's time, but his citations suggest that some lingering social stigma might still have attached to their doing so. I am grateful to Mary Oleskiewicz for bringing Schulze's little volume to my attention.

By the time of the work's composition it had become a cliché to complain of women's predilection for coffee; yet coffee houses evidently constituted a male domain in some parts of contemporary Europe. If the latter included Bach's Leipzig, then we might imagine performances of this music within a male homosocial environment not entirely unlike that of Strozzi's cantatas. In fact, however, certain Leipzig collegium concerts were announced as being open to both men and women, and as we know nothing about Bach's actual performances of the Coffee Cantata it would be best not to assume anything about its first audiences.²⁸

Nevertheless, the work's text, by Bach's frequent collaborator Picander (Christian Friedrich Henrici), is clearly a satire on women. Despite his modern fame as author of such sacred works as Bach's St Matthew Passion, Picander was also a talented comic poet, and his Coffee Cantata presents Liesgen's obsessive desire for coffee almost explicitly as displaced desire for a husband. The concluding chorus, with its complaint that women and girls are attracted to coffee as cats are to mice, would have constituted a polite expression of the common view that social problems can be traced to the inappropriate and unrestrained desires of women.²⁹

Bach's music for this text is no different stylistically from that of his other mature cantatas, sacred or secular. Nevertheless, unlike the great majority of both Bach's and Strozzi's works, this is a true musical drama, with two dramatically opposed characters, Liesgen and her father Schlendrian. According to a current view of early eighteenth-century musical drama, these characters are drawn primarily through their arias, and it is in these that one might seek musical elements that mark the two characters as male and female, respectively.³⁰

One might begin with the assignment of these arias to bass and soprano voices, respectively—a trivial element, perhaps, except that in the Italian opera theater of the period even

²⁸ Neumann, “Das 'Bachische Collegium Musicum,’” 7, 11, 18, mentions concert announcements for performances by the Gerlachische Collegium Musicum—the same group that Bach also directed—inviting attendance by both “Cavaliers und Damen.” But the explicit indication that polite women were welcome at these concerts might mean that the same was not true of all public performances. Schulze (pp. 52–4) assumes that female roles would have been sung by male falsettists, perhaps because contemporary accounts frequently refer to both listeners and performers in collegium performances as the *Herrn Auditores*, *Herrn Studiosen*, and the like. In most cases it is not known which works were performed at individual concerts; a coffee-house performance of what has been presumed to have been Bach's Coffee Cantata was advertised at Frankfurt (Main) in 1739 (see, however, Werner Neumann, ed., *Johann Sebastian Bach: Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke*, I/40, *Kritischer Bericht* [Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1970], 198).

²⁹ The final chorus is absent from the printed text in Picander's *Gedichte*; the authorship of its text is thus uncertain, but there is no particular reason to ascribe it to Bach, as is sometimes done.

³⁰ Winton Dean has been particularly persuasive in depicting late-Baroque musical drama as a drama of character that is played out in the successive arias assigned to each role; see, e.g., “Handel as Opera Composer,” chap. 1 in Winton Dean and John Merrill Knapp, *Handel's Operas 1704–1726*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1–21.

this distinction did not hold; high voices generally served for heroic male roles, and women were at least occasionally still sung by tenors, at least in comic parts. Less superficially, one might point in the father Schlendrian's case to the somewhat exaggeratedly, even pedantically, rhetorical character of his music. His opening aria makes obsessive use of repetition and repeated-note motives, whereas his second aria employs dissonances that are arguably more extreme than is called for by the text (ex. 5). In both cases, it is the insistent, even pedantic quality of the musical rhetoric that might seem to characterize the father—qualities likely to be associated within the world of the cantata or eighteenth-century Leipzig society with educated men, not with women.

Hat man nicht mit sei-nen Kin-dern bun-der-tau-send Hu-de.

Hat man nicht mit sei-nen

5a. Bach, Coffee Cantata BWV 211, mvt. 2, mm. 7–9

5b. Bach, Coffee Cantata BWV 211, mvt. 6, mm. 7–10

The text that is set so dissonantly in example 5b is, however, a description of Liesgen, and the dissonances—both melodic and harmonic—are superficially a representation of her *harte Sinne*, her hardened mind. As musical rhetoric, then, this dissonance is a representation of the daughter; the question is whether to some degree it also serves as dramatic characterization of the father. This would surely be the case if the daughter's arias never employed similarly extreme musical rhetoric. One might compare Liesgen's first aria, whose text refers to the sweet taste of coffee (ex. 6). The style here is distinct from that of her father's arias, as is evident particularly from the numerous triplets and the use of the transverse flute, both then fashionable elements of the galant style. Yet Bach employs his usual musical rhetoric here, with text repetitions and expressive dissonances just where one might have expected them. This aria seems more or less equal in musico-rhetorical technique to the father's, making it difficult to see any gender-based musical differentiation of the two characters.

Nevertheless, in its context the aria does contribute to a construction of gender. For it is an expression of desire, and although this is merely a desire for coffee, Bach responds to it in much the same way as in sacred arias whose text is concerned with spiritual desire. One might compare any number of Bach cantata arias whose texts refer in some way to the desire for union with Christ—most often through death but also through the marriage theme employed in Cantata 140. Marriage is again the subject of Cantata 49, a dialogue for soprano and bass composed and first performed at Leipzig in 1726; the text is anonymous but it bears some marks of Picander's composition. In the first aria the bass declares: “I go and seek you with longing” (*Ich geh' und suche mit Verlangen*); characteristically for Bach's arias on this subject, it is set in a “sharp” minor key, C-sharp minor, and the setting is replete with expressive dissonances and chromatic lines, particularly on the word *Verlangen*, longing or desire (ex. 7). One might note here as well the accompaniment for obligato organ, which makes extensive use of the same triplets, favored in the fashionable galant style, that are found in the aria from the Coffee cantata. These features are probably insufficient to constitute the musical depiction of any specific image, but they do help define a category or genre of movement to which both arias belong.

21
Ei! wie schmeckt der Cof-fee sü - ße, lieb - li - cher als tau-send Küs - se

22
mil - der als Mus-ka - ten - wein. Ei! ei! wie schmeckt der

31
Cof-fee. ei! ei! ei! wie sü - ße, ei! wie schmeckt der. Cof-fee

41
sü - ße, lieb - li - cher als tau-send Küs-se, mil - der als Mus-ka - ten - wein, mil -

49
- der als Mus-ka - ten - wein.

6. Bach, Coffee Cantata BWV 211, mvt. 4, mm. 22-51

The image displays a musical score for a piece by J.S. Bach, BWV 49, movement 2. It consists of four systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The music is in G major and 3/4 time. The lyrics are: "Ich geh' und suche mit Verlangen dich, meine Tanne, schönste Braut, dich, meine Tanne, schönste Braut, dich, dich, meine Tanne, schönste Braut, ich geh' und suche mit Verlangen, und suche".

7. Bach, *Ich geh' und suche mit Verlangen* BWV 49, mvt. 2, mm. 24–40

In the coffee aria we might compare the dissonant counterpoint and in particular the two fermatas on the word *süsse* (“sweet”), sung as a diminished seventh that resolves to the dominant of B minor (ex. 6, m. 38). One might interpret these dissonances as expressing something like the sweet pangs of love, a common enough Baroque conceit, or more literally as a representation of the pain of separation from one's beloved, except that the object of love has become a drink or a drug. On a more concrete level they constitute the routine application of Baroque musical rhetoric, which, however, becomes ironic if not satirical in light of the absurdity of the situation: music-rhetorical topoi employed elsewhere to express sacred or spiritual longings are here employed for caffeine craving. When one considers the text's explicit concern with marriage, it is not too far-fetched to interpret Liessgen's wish for coffee as what we would call a sublimated sexual desire. Coffee in early eighteenth-century Leipzig must have remained something fairly

exotic, and caffeine must have had a powerful effect on many drinkers who did not share the modern habit of partaking of it every morning. We can presume that many of the aria's first hearers would have approved the cantata's image of a young woman seized by a socially questionable desire for the drink. Liesgen is, in short, a polite version of the lascivious female, and the satire in this work masks serious social tensions.

We can understand the aria as contributing to its first audiences' construction of gender, yet we cannot say that gender or gendered qualities are represented by the music. This may well be true not only of the vocal works of Bach and Strozzi but of Baroque music in general. The semiotic systems active in Baroque music are probably less specific than those of nineteenth-century program music, so that even such well-known musical signs as chromatic scale segments or chaconne bass lines can have a wide range of associations. Moreover, the purpose of these signs was rarely to present a narrative, as it was in so much nineteenth-century music; rather, in Baroque vocal music, they support the rhetoric already present in the verbal text, chiefly by providing various forms of emphasis for individual words. Even then, context is everything, so that a melting *appoggiatura* that might be associated in one work with eroticized desire might symbolize grief in another work.

In such an environment, representation of something as complex as gender can only be an emergent quantity. We can trace it not to individual musical signs but to the intersection and interaction of music, verbal text, and performance situation. This is fundamentally different from representation in nineteenth-century music, where essentialized "feminine" and other gendered qualities were presumed to be inherent in particular musical motives or other signs. Future studies of Baroque gender representations, and of Baroque musical representation in general, might aim at testing and fleshing out this distinction.